
DR. WEBSTER'S

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

Webster (Jr.)

INTRODUCTORY

TO THE COURSE ON

A N A T O M Y ,

IN

GENEVA MEDICAL COLLEGE.

SESSION 1842-43.

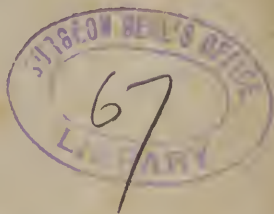


BY JAMES WEBSTER, M. D.,

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1842.

PROFESSOR WEBSTER,

DEAR SIR: We, the undersigned, as a committee appointed by the Medical Class, of Geneva College, take pleasure in soliciting a copy of your Introductory Address for publication. By complying with this request, you will confer a favor upon the Class and

Your humble servants,

JOHN S. TROWBRIDGE,
LANDON WELLS,
JNO. S. CLARK,
CHARLES D. ELY,
H. CHAMBERS,

COMMITTEE.

GENEVA, November 2, 1842.

GENTLEMEN :—

Not feeling at liberty to decline your polite request, accompanying this I send you a copy of my Address, which is at your disposal. Accept assurances of continued regard, from

Sincerely yours,

JAMES WEBSTER.

To MESSRS. TROWBRIDGE, WELLS, and others,

COMMITTEE.

A D D R E S S .

GENTLEMEN :

On the return of another Collegiate session, allow me, in the first place, to offer my congratulations at witnessing so many old and familiar faces, and to bid a hearty welcome to so many new ones. Since many of us last met, the seasons have made their annual round, and at the moment of renewing old, and of entering into new relations, a solemn admonition comes to us on the balmy airs of Spring, on the zephyr breezes of Summer, and the stormy gales of Autumn, each tuning the harp of Nature over the early graves of some of those who then left us, with hopes as warm, and with anticipations as sanguine, as can animate the bosom of any one who now listens to me. Let not, then, these reflections be lost on you ; and in view of the important relations into which we are now about to enter, in view of the high responsibilities you are about to assume, may you deeply feel, and duly estimate the character of our relations, and the importance of your responsibilities, as you shall now faithfully discharge your duties, to fit you for the higher destinies which await you in your professional career, and the rewards and honors which shall crown you at its close, when we trust it may be said to each and all of you, "well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Assembling as we do to-day, under circumstances so peculiarly promising for the permanence of our Institution, with prospects so flattering to the pride, and so gratifying to ourselves, and to the friends who have cherished and sustained us, in our efforts to establish in this region of the West, a great Medical School,—I say, whilst we have cause for congratulation in these reflections, the mind is almost insensibly led to a contemplation of the changes of the last half century, around the very spot where we now meet, a goodly throng, to present our offerings at the altar of science.

But little more than half a century since, and the place we occupy, was a howling wilderness, tenanted only by the wild beast of the forest, and peopled by a savage race, over the remembrance of whose wrongs we pay the tribute of a tear, as we track their flight in characters of blood, from the wigwams of their fathers, the altars of their sires, and their happy hunting-grounds, to find a refuge beyond the haunts of civilization, where they may again assemble around their council-fires, undisturbed by the intrusion of the pale face. Touching but incidentally upon this topic, memories of the recent past, crowd upon us in rapid succession, and the mighty revolution which has here been effected within the life-time of man, tells in characters of living light, the glorious destiny which is reserved for this favored region of our happy land. And now, therefore, whilst the ear can almost catch as it fades in the distance, the dying echo of the moccason tread of the last of the Senecas, imagination carries us back to that period of our history, when the wild notes of war were borne upon the breeze, and re-echoed from mountain to glen; when the martial tramp of the war-horse, and the

shrill click of the Indian's rifle, told here of contention, of struggling, and of death.

Following in the wake of the victorious and exterminating army of Sullivan, we next observe the hardy western pioneer :—

“He is gone where the footsteps of man never ventured,
Where the glooms of the wild-tangled forest are centered,
Where no beam of the sun, or the sweet moon has entered,
No blood-hound has roused up the deer with his bay.”

“He has left the green valley, for paths where the bison
Roams through the prairies, or leaps o'er the flood ;
Where the snake, in the swamp, sucks the deadliest poison,
And the cat of the mountains, keeps watch for its food.
But the leaf shall be greener, the sky shall be purer,
The eye shall be clearer, the rifle be surer,
And stronger the arm of the fearless endurer,
That trusts nought but heaven in his way through the wood.”

The giants of the forest fall before his sturdy stroke ; clearings are rapidly effected, and the sun imparts its genial rays, to give light and heat to the fallow. Soon the labors of the husbandman are rewarded in rich and luxuriant harvests, and well-filled granaries ; the earth yields her increase with a lavish hand ; improvement travels in the car of time, and as if by the touch of the enchanter's wand, or like the visions of an eastern fairy tale, in an almost incredibly short period, in place of the primeval forests, we see extending through the long line of country embraced between the valley of the Mohawk, along the southern counties, through the valley of the Genesee, to Niagara's dark waters, one broad expanse of richly cultivated fields, proclaiming the garden of the Empire State !—villages have sprung up in every direction, their spires pointing heavenward, announcing the character of our people—

large and populous cities, too, whose inhabitants will vie with those of any of the older cities of the sea-board for enterprise, intelligence and virtue—colleges, academies, and seminaries of learning, in every district, from the primary school to the highest class of literary institutions, tell of the deep and pervading interest here felt in the cause of education ; whilst every branch of mechanical labor, the pursuits of literature and science, and the cultivation of the fine arts, have been carried on with a zeal, a talent, and an energy unsurpassed in the records of the world.

Such, then, are some of the changes of a few short years, and with the spread of population, until it now reaches nearly a million of inhabitants ; with every day's increase in the facilities of communication, through the medium of our canals and railroads, which have brought us into close and intimate, nay, almost daily intercourse with the great Emporium of this western world, it excites no special wonder, that in her rapid march to greatness and wealth, among her wants, a School for the Medical education of her sons, should early attract attention, and be carried to a successful issue. It is not my intention to occupy your time by a detail of the rise and progress of this Institution, but as part of her history, I will call your attention briefly to the result of the labors of the pioneers of Medical education in Western New-York.

As might naturally be supposed, the Medical Department of Geneva College has had difficulties to encounter, obstacles to surmount, prejudices to overcome. Fortunately for her interests, and fortunately for the interests of science and humanity, the pioneers who engaged in this great enterprise, entered upon the important task with the same unfaltering spirit ; the same undying zeal, and the

same irrepressible ardor, which actuated the pilgrims of our father-land, who have brought a mighty nation out of chaos, and converted a dreary wilderness into a land of promise. Yes, gentlemen, on this day, when we assemble for the first time within these spacious walls—when we reflect that but nine years have elapsed since the organization of this Institution, and that she now ranks in point of numbers, among the first Medical Schools of these United States; when we look upon her as yet but in the infancy of her being, and remember (mark, I speak it in a professional sense,) that “westward the star of empire points the way,” surely we may be allowed to look forward to the period of her maturity, as offering a brilliant promise of usefulness and honor, and we are prepared at once to wreath an unfading chaplet for the brow of those who have stood unmoved amidst the clouds which have lowered, and who can now calmly enjoy the sunshine of her prosperity, and reap an ample reward for all the toils, the labors, and the anxieties of the pioneers—at once her founders and her patrons.* Long, gentlemen, may they continue to participate in her councils; long may their persuasive eloquence be permitted to exercise its salutary influence over those departments of Medical science, to which they add dignity and importance by the simplicity and clearness of their precepts, and their skill and acumen in their practical application. Long, I say, may they be spared to witness the triumphs of their indomitable perseverance, and to enjoy the proud satisfaction of seeing arise, under their own auspices, an honored temple, dedicated to the noble cause of education, and which will remain long after they

* Professors SPENCER and COVENTRY.

shall be gathered to their fathers, an enduring monument of their foresight and wisdom.

May I ask you, again, to accompany me back to the opening of this Institution, in 1835, whilst I quote a few remarks from the address delivered on that occasion :
 “Unaided by those rich endowments which are common in European schools, we commence this Course of Lectures on our private resources, resting our future support on a friendly and enlightened community. Rivalry has had no share in the determination to form this Institution; public good, and a laudable emulation to advance the cause of science, by disseminating those truths which have been acquired by reading, reflection, and many years of practical experience, have been their primary objects.—Being convinced that the importance of a Medical education is duly appreciated by every liberal mind, we enter on our respective duties with a confidence that we shall be sustained by a discerning and enlightened population, not only of Western New-York, but of the adjoining States.”

In thus quoting the language of one of our former, and one of our earliest associates,—one, who, whether at the domestic hearth, or around the social circle; in the laboratory of the chemist, or in the chamber of sickness; tossed upon the broad Atlantic’ wave, amid the roar of cannon,

“While o’er him fast, through sail and shroud,
 The wreathing fires made way,”

or, when the eagle of victory perched upon the banner of his country,—one, who, in every situation, and under every circumstance of life, may be held up to you for emulation, as a bright example of the soul of honor—I cannot but rejoice that, full of years and full of honors, he has been spared this day to witness the triumphant success of his

predictions ; to learn that his generous confidence in an enlightened people was not misplaced, and to know, moreover, that EDWARD CUTBUSH, *clarum et venerabile nomen !* will ever be associated among the pioneers of Medical education in the West ; and that whilst his name will be cherished in fond remembrance, it will often serve us a beacon-light to direct the steps of many a youthful alumnus of the Institution he once so ably sustained, and which he so materially aided to establish.

Having thus incidentally introduced to your notice the pioneers who engaged in this important enterprise, which has resulted so successfully and so beneficially to the professional character of this section of our State, I am led by duty, no less than by inclination, to crave your indulgence whilst I endeavor to render justice to others. Among those who reared its foundation, in the changes of time, but two remain now connected with the Institution, who have stood firm and true to her interests ;—unshrinking amidst her vicissitudes, and who have followed her fortunes with a steady and persevering effort, until they now behold erected, a superstructure, of which they may justly be proud. Until the last two years, however, the organization of the Medical Department of Geneva College was not considered perfectly completed ; at that time, an additional Chair was created, and the Faculty was re-organized by the appointment of three of the Professors of the Fairfield Medical School, to the respective Chairs, since occupied by those gentlemen with such signal ability.

In these days of self-adulation, when every year brings us intelligence in the form of introductory lectures, from what are represented as the *special* seats of learning and

science,—whose authors spend their brief introductory hour to laud their own exploits, or to praise their own fitness for the place and station,—surely an humble teacher in a country Medical School, may say a few words, complimentary to his colleagues, without risking the charge of “o’erstepping the modesty of nature.”

Yet on reflection, wherefore need I say one word in praise of such men as HADLEY and DELAMATER?—names which are inscribed upon the charters of professional liberty of three-fifths of the Medical men of our State; names which stand forth in bold relief among the most successful teachers of the land; names which are cherished with affectionate regard, by all who can appreciate purity of purpose, singleness of heart, and all that adds dignity and grace to the christian and the professorial character.

It is possible I may be thought by many as trespassing too much upon your time and patience, in thus availing myself of the latitude allowable in an Introductory discourse; the occasion, however, is one which naturally gives rise to a train of thought and feeling, it may be well to indulge in for the moment. Presently, we shall be surrounded by the frail and perishable memorials of mortality, and as I may hold up for your instruction the skeleton hand, or the tenantless skull, or the pulseless heart, you will perhaps give little heed beyond the mere remembrance of their professional value—you may indeed listen attentively to the dry details of structure, and may feel astonishment at the complicated mechanism;—you may be struck with wonder at its beauty of adaptation to the various purposes of life, or impressed with an almost overwhelming sense of the importance of an accurate acquaintance with it, to lead you in safety along the pathway of

professional life. But, gentlemen, I appeal to you, is this enough? When we reflect that even at this very moment, in this very room, the skeleton fingers of the King of Terrors may be playing around, and feeling the last pulsations of some youthful heart;—I appeal to you, is not this a time and an occasion, when it is proper to direct our thoughts far beyond the mere earthly tabernacle—to connect in our imagination the remembrance of the spirit that once gave life, and thought, and feeling, and animation to the now mouldering remains,—to trace in these dull records of the past, the certainty of the future;—and to realize that, amidst the continual changes which are going on in the natural world, our perishing bodies too, must soon mingle in one common sepulchre.

Thus fixing our thoughts, and thus training our minds, at the moment of entering upon the pursuit of a branch of science, which momentarily unfolds to the view, some new and imposing evidence of the power of creative wisdom, the youthful student of Anatomy cannot fail, in his silent and lonely hours of meditation, to unite this volume of Nature with the records of Inspiration;—the current of his mind will thus be imperceptibly carried along, until it reaches the mighty river of living waters, and his frail barque borne upon its peaceful bosom, will find at length, a secure and an everlasting refuge on the Rock of Ages. How appropriate, then, the beautiful language of the poet:

“Behold, how of earth, all the glories depart,
Our visions are baseless, our hopes but a gleam,
Our staff but a reed, and our life but a dream.

Then oh, let us look, let our prospects allure,
To scenes that can fade not, to realms that endure,
To glories, to blessings, that triumph sublime,
O’er the blightings of change, and the ruins of time.”

Even from the very dawn of creation, to the present day, the solemn, the emphatic warning given in the garden of Eden, has hung heavily upon the memory of man, "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." When we take a glance through the long vista of past ages, we see man from the earliest period of his being, subject to suffering and disease, preparatory to the fulfillment of the solemn sentence pronounced upon him. Taught, then, even from the very moment of created nature, to understand that his present state of existence is but as a span in the broad expanse of time; that the period must soon arrive, when he shall be severed from all the ties which bind him to this earth, and that he must enter into that land from whence no traveller returns,—endowed by nature with superior faculties,—ranking first in the scale of animal creation, we are not surprised to see him early calling into play the energies of his mind; directing his attention to the investigation of the phenomena of diseases and of death; and as a result of these investigations, adopting such means as seemed calculated to relieve his sufferings; to lengthen out the frail tenure which bound him to existence, and to procrastinate the last great change.

Accordingly, we find, upon reverting to the early history of the world, that the protecting hand of Providence was extended towards him; that when assailed by pain, a remedy was provided and naturally sought for, and that by this means, an accession to the stock of remedies was continually made, and each in proportion to its intrinsic merits was carefully noted down, or treasured in the memory, to be transmitted to succeeding generations. From historians, we learn that to the inscriptions on the walls of the temples in Egypt and Greece, we are indebted for

many of the facts recorded in the writings of antiquity. In the dark and gloomy ages of superstition and barbarism, Medicine found a refuge in the cloister, and priests became physicians by pretending to unfold the oracles consulted by the people, who were taught to ascribe the visitations of disease to the anger of the Gods, requiring the performance of certain rites and ceremonies, to conciliate their favor, to excite their pity, or to avert their displeasure. As the pure light of the rising sun of Medical science dispelled these phantoms of ignorance and superstition—as the importance of our art to the human race became more manifest, it was more extensively cultivated, until by the collective efforts of a few distinguished men, upon a basis so feeble, has been reared that splendid monument of intellectual greatness, from which are now distributed the blessings of health and happiness to the habitations of man.

Let us occupy a few moments to cast a glance over the extensive field which is opening to your view, as you are entering upon the study of a profession, involving so many, and so great responsibilities—there was a period in the history of Medicine, when the knowledge of a few simples constituted the sum total of the Physician's art—like every other branch of science, the sun has dawned upon its infancy, shone upon its childhood, and now sheds its bright beams upon its maturity. We trace a long and illustrious line of Fathers, who each in their day and generation, have contributed the results of their experience and observation, until it may now be regarded as one of the exact sciences. The rational empiricism of Hippocrates, gave place to the blind empiricism of Herophilus—the doctrines of the Methodics, gave place to the Eclectic school—these again variously modified by the Peripatetics, the

Chemists, and other sects, who perplexed themselves with hypotheses and conjectures, instead of induction from facts, continued to retard the progress of Medical science from the days of Galen, until the time of Lord Bacon; then the overthrow of the scholastic system gave place to the true method of inductive reasoning, and adopting the true and simple philosophy of his vigorous and brilliant mind, Medical philosophers have since been content to confine their attention to the establishment, as near as may be, of the universality of fact from experience, observation and experiment.

Thus we shall find, on turning back the page of history, that even before and since the time of Bacon, every real improvement in our art has been the result of observation and experience—and here let us turn to the accumulated records of talent and industry; let us inquire into the labors of those illustrious men, who have given to Medicine its form and pressure, and we shall find accumulated in one vast pile, fact upon fact, observation upon observation, and volume upon volume; thus too, we shall be enabled to form some estimate of the extent of labor which will be required at *your* hands, if you honestly fulfill the obligations you pledge yourselves to perform, when you assume the characters of the students of a science, which, in its practical duties, will lead you through scenes of pestilence, of suffering, and of anguish, either as the messengers of death, or the harbingers of hope and gladness.

I will not detain you by a recital of the obligations which the conscientious physician must assume in discharging the duties of his high calling, and which must be obvious to the common observer; there are matters, however, connected with the subject, which I think it proper to allude

to here. In an address, delivered some years ago, before the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, by the late Judge Hopkinson, of Philadelphia, and which, to a certain extent, is applicable to the present day, he says: "It is certainly true that the talents of this country have not yet been directed to subjects of erudite literature and profound science;" and among the causes of this deficiency, he remarks: "Our social intercourse is so early and unreserved, as very soon to involve a young man of any sensibility, in a matrimonial engagement; and at the age when a devoted scholar would be seeking a retired chamber in the university, and collecting his musty volumes, our youth is looking for a convenient dwelling, and purchasing the necessary furniture. In truth, a beautiful woman is so much more attractive, and easily understood, than a Greek manuscript, that we cannot, very harshly, censure the preference."

"Another cause may be added, that our young men are, at a very early age, turned into the world to maintain themselves; they must, therefore, adopt some occupation which will yield immediate profit."

Now in reference to the first of these propositions, I have nothing to say; but this much is very certain, that to accomplish the end proposed in the second, it is by no means uncommon for the pettifoggers of physie to endeavor to secure the favor and praises of the Lady Bountiful's of their neighborhood. But on the second proposition, I would remark, it has appeared to me that the requirements for admission into what are termed the learned professions, are entirely too small. In our day—in the days of Peter Parley, when Hume and Smollett, Locke and Newton, and Copernicus and Kepler, are remembered only by name—

when "learning made easy" might be an appropriate motto for some of our schools, I am aware that I touch on dangerous ground, when I question the fallibility of our laws and our law-givers; but neither my connexion with an Institution which justly prides herself upon her advantages, nor any feeling of mock-modesty, can prevent me from expressing freely my sentiments in relation to a subject of so much moment to the public weal. An apprenticeship of six years, is considered a short period to form a good and skillful mechanic,—whilst by the modern high-pressure system, (thanks to the wisdom of our Legislature,) three years, eight months of which shall be devoted to collegiate exercises, are deemed amply sufficient to make a Doctor! Yes, that's the phrase, to make a Doctor.

Well, then, at the end of this probation, many of our young men leave the precincts of the College vainly imagining that their education is complete, and that they are prepared at once successfully to encounter disease in all its varied forms;—it is true, I am aware, that there are others of more liberal and expanded minds, who feel their own weakness, and toil ceaselessly by day and by night to make up for their acknowledged deficiency. Now, however, too often begins the struggle without sufficient preparation, for what will yield "immediate profit." Gentlemen, there is something radically wrong here—the Profession is ennobling in its influence, yet I have known an individual, I will not dignify him with the appellation of a man, sit by a patient, when nature cried aloud in her utmost agony for that assistance which he could render, but which was denied, until the dollars and cents were meted out to him! Let me tell you, the very moment that you begin to prostitute the noble ends of your sacred calling,

merely to the base purposes of "profit," you sacrifice all the generous aspirations of your manhood—you become callous to all the finer and the better feelings of human nature; careless alike of human suffering, and reckless of human life. If, then, any of you come here solely for purposes of "profit" hereafter, in God's name, I say, turn back. Agriculture, Mechanics, Commerce, all invite you to the shrine of Mammon; but this is not the field for you—it is a field only for the exercise of all the benevolent affections; it is a field for the exhibition of zeal in the promotion of science, and tender sympathy for others' sufferings; it is a field, the proper cultivation of which will yield you a rich and luxuriant harvest, in an approving conscience, for time and for eternity.

In conclusion, Gentlemen, it is possible we may never again meet under similar circumstances with those which have brought us together at this time. I look forward, therefore, with deep and anxious solicitude to the result of my labors during the ensuing session. Entering upon the discharge of my important duties, with, I trust, a full sense of my responsibilities to you, to the Institution, and to the community, need I ask you to reciprocate the feeling? Let me say to you, without a correct knowledge of Anatomy, whilst I can have a voice, the honors of Geneva College are inevitably closed against you. When, however, you regard the importance of this branch of Medical science;—when you examine its bearing and influence upon every other department;—when you look upon it strictly as the alphabet of the profession, I have no fears that you will disregard this admonition:—Remember that the temptations to idleness and false pleasure, which are constantly beckoning the youth who crowd our populous

cities, are wanting here ; and that consequently far more will be expected, and far more required of you, than can be looked or hoped for, from the student of the crime-girt city, who too often returns to the parental home, enfeebled in constitution, depraved in habits, and corrupted in morals. Listen not, then, to the song of the syren sloth, as she would lull you in a false security ; but be vigilant, be watchful, be untiring in your efforts, and keep ever before you the prize of your high calling.

